Legalize Crime + Against Revolution, Winter © 2018

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LEGALIZE CRIME + AGAINST REVOLUTION

by Winter

A CONVERSATION ON WINTER'S *LEGALIZE CRIME + AGAINST REVOLUTION*

Jamie Berrout (booklet series editor): I'm glad you have something to start off this conversation, lol. There's so much in the text that I know we can bring out, every line in it feels dense and rich with meaning. I also wasn't sure if I had even posed a real question to you, so I'm curious about the answer you came up with!

Winter: Awesome. This is so cool lmao. So when you brought up the possibility of a Q and A, you gave as an example, "Like where you wrote that community leaders must be opposed, I think about how trans women in leadership positions in non-profits/government that have a desire to help trans women still are forced to create/follow rules and control access to resources, which results in them hurting and leaving aside a lot of trans women. But I know your thought goes farther than that, you're questioning this idea of community more fundamentally because of the work it demands." And I've tried to

answer that:

Whenever I think about community and organisation I am thinking about two things. The first is a phrase which has stuck in my mind ever since I first heard it, "The war of all against all," and the second is when Jesus says, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."

Apparently that first quote is from a guy called Thomas Hobbes. I guess he meant it disparagingly, because he was writing about why and how societies form and this is how he described what he saw as the ghastly alternative. But of course when I heard it I just thought, wow, that fucking rules, and immediately made the connection to that passage from the bible. I think Jesus goes on to say, "I have come to set man against his father, daughter against her mother," etc.

There is another statement of this same thing I think in Tiqqun, *Introduction to Civil War* (which I haven't actually read). In that they say, "I call 'communism' the real movement that elaborates, everywhere and at every moment, civil war." It is this endless civil war that I want. I want the powerful to turn on each other until they destroy themselves and then I want communities to turn on each other until they collapse. I want to smash rocks together until they make smaller rocks and then smash those into sand. I want to atomise the world. That's how you expose the truth of things.

My problem with community is the way it mythologizes relationships. A relationship is a connection between two people, and when you have many people who know many of the same people all those connections form a network. That's like, real. That's a thing that exists. People form networks. But the claim that community makes is to draw itself as a circle around this network of people and say that this is the most important

relationship between them. It's invented something that's not there by claiming a network of connected people is instead a group, which I dont think is a real thing. And in the process it obscures the actual connections in place, along with their power dynamics, instead claiming that everyone within is on a level playing field because they are part of the same community. And then it demands that no one questions it, or the actual connections and power dynamics at play, and it attacks viciously anyone who disrupts the feeling of community. I think we should always be looking at connections and not at groups. When we look at connections we see that the community is a myth.

Family mythologizes relationships as well. It invents connections that aren't there, obligations, hierarchy. It's just a way of lying to people about what's going on. Family and community are both abuse enablers. People can only do so much on their own; it is communities that allow the worst horrors to take place. Communities are the prerequisite for prisons and police.

Community says "the community is here for you, it's going to look after you," and then it demands your labor and your obedience. And it's under no obligation to keep its promise. But like, all relationships are like this. You say of someone, "Oh, we are dating," but what does that mean? That means a million different things to a million different people. If you only say this one person ends up expecting one thing and the other expects another, and a lot of pain is caused. Only by talking to that person about your wants and needs and boundaries do you finally get to what your relationship actually is. And then there is no word for that except, that long conversation you had about it. The connection between two people is infinitely complex, and it's ongoing, it's evolving. It can only be what it is and not anything that you call it.

So, all relationships are mythologizing, they're all false promises, they're all unspoken obligations and expectations of labor. And it is these myths that need to be shattered. We should not be aiming to strengthen our relationships and our communities but to destroy them, by which I mean to destroy our assumptions and misconceptions of them, which is of course all they end up being. When all illusion of community is gone only then can we see what relationships actually exist - and are possible - underneath.

Jamie: This is good, I think that answers some of the questions about community, how it's more than an issue of community extracting labor or enabling abuse but that those forms of violence are the result of the claim of group identity. Saying we are this certain group of people (different from others) already involves and enables violence because all group claims are artificial/imposed and the only way you can force that sense of cohesion is through the use of rules and control and force.

Before we go any further, though, I want to make it clear that this critique isn't directed specifically towards identity politics or groups of marginalized people. I mean... lol, the critique definitely applies in the sense that ultimately the abolition of identity, community, and politics seems to be required in order for all of us to be liberated. And it's also true in the sense that staggering amounts of abuse have been inflicted on trans women precisely because of our involvements in our so-called communities: it's these everyday horrors that we experience as activists in leftist or POC organizations, as residents of queer/trans houses, as members of a church or religious group, etc. It's a much broader critique that extends far beyond identity groups and into things like family, nation, citizenry—all of

these communities are deeply violent and cause a lot of the problems we see on a daily basis.

I can imagine a lot of people reading your zines and this conversation—especially women of color, who are always tasked with holding these communities together both through their care and labor and through their bearing of the worst violence of these communities—will feel hurt by this. Part of me feels that way too. Because we've given so much and suffered so much to create these groups in the hopes that we would find some safe harbor within them. We desperately want to believe in these myths, but all of us have experienced enough in these groups to know that they don't protect us, they can't, they won't ever. I mean, many trans women of color have spoken out about how they experience the worst or at least the most direct forms of violence from their own communities: Black trans women being attacked by Black men who pursue them; trans Latinas being harrassed, thrown out, left to die by their Latines neighbors. But the question then is, what's left for us after community?

That's where the quotes come in. It's the idea that we'll arrive at the truth and finally see each other as we are once we embrace this "endless civil war." Which is a civil war that has nothing to do with 1861-65 or race on its own, but that I think (correct me if I'm wrong) could be restated as "a war within communities and against civil society."

What I find really interesting is that I came across that same concept of "endless civil war" in a various texts by scholars working in the current of Black studies known as Afro-pessimism. But rather than working from a communist or anarchist tradition, these scholars are researching slavery and its afterlife and trying to explain the profound sort of ontological dislocation caused by centuries of slavery, with this central idea that the

experience of slavery (which it's been argued continues today in different forms) exiled the Black subject from the category of human, stripping them of such things as "social recognition, volition, subjecthood, and the valuation of life" and exposing them to the limitless, arbitrary antagonism of non-Black people. So Afro-pessimism arrives at that very dissolution of the relations between people, of community and all identity, as a result of a Black revolution that ends anti-Blackness.

You don't have to respond to all of this, but I wanted to leave a couple of excerpts from texts that I'm working from here:

To overcome anti-blackness, there would have to be what Fanon had called a 'program of complete disorder,' an expropriation and affirmation of the very violence perpetuated against black existence and a fundamental reorientation of the social coordinates of the Human relation. It would entail a war against the concept of humanity and a war that splits civil society to its core, a civil war that would elaborate itself to the death.

R.L. "Wanderings of the Slave: Black life and Social Death"
http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/wanderings-slave-black-life-and-social-death

I do believe that there is a way out. But I believe that the way out is a kind of violence so magnificent and so comprehensive that it scares the hell out of even radical revolutionaries. So, in other words, the trajectory of violence that Black slave revolts suggest, whether it be in the 21st century or the 19th century, is a violence against the generic categories of life, agency being one of them. That's what I meant by an epistemological catastrophe. Marx posits an epistemological crisis, which is to say moving

from one system of human arrangements and relations to another system of human relations and arrangements. What Black people embody is the potential for a catastrophe of human arrangements writ large. I think that there have been moments—the Black Liberation Army in the 1970s and 1980s is a prime example—of how the political violence of the Black Liberation Army far outpaced the anti-capitalist and internationalist discourse that it had and that's what scares people; and as Saidiya Hartman says, "A Black revolution makes everyone freer than they actually want to be." A Marxist revolution blows the lid off of economic relations; a feminist revolution blows the lid off patriarchal relations; a Black revolution blows the lid off the unconscious and relations writ large.

Frank B. Wilderson, III. *Afro-Pessimism: An Introduction*. https://rackedanddispatched.noblogs.org/files/2017/01/Afro-pessimism2_imposed.pdf

Winter: I definitely want to echo what you said about this not being particular to identity politics. The problems that most people critique in identity politics are the same problems they miss in their own, are problems universal to politics itself. So it's a critique of all politics, and of everything that comes prior to politics and makes them possible.

I love seeing people coming to the same (or similar) conclusions from completely different starting points. It feels like in mathematics when you are told to check your answer by solving a problem in two different ways. I especially love the quotes, "I do believe that there is a way out. But I believe that the way out is a kind of violence so magnificent and so comprehensive that it scares the hell out of even radical revolutionaries," and, "A Black revolution makes everyone freer than

they actually want to be." I'll have to look into those works if there are other people already talking about this kind of thing.

These examples also make me think of authoritarian revolutionaries as well as cis feminists who claim to want an end to gendered oppression but in reality cannot imagine and are terrified by such a thing. Most of what we call revolution is, I think, just slightly more comprehensive reform. People only manage to think in terms of "like capitalism, but..." or "like patriarchy, but..." where they change one or two things but leave the structure intact, even while thinking they are proposing something completely different. In reality it is extremely difficult for us to think outside of what we already know, and that scares people. A truly different form of life will require a step into the unknown.

Jamie: That's one of the things that drew me to your writing, it's that uncompromising vision of revolution which far outstrips so much of the body of leftist writing that tends to leave those old structures in place. Especially after reading Afro-pessimist texts, and coming to grips with my complicity in anti-Blackness as a non-Black person of color, I'm trying to ask myself whether the so-called revolutionary efforts I come across actually speak to the concerns of this current of Black thought and offer a way out. And I think what haunts a lot of leftist writing and projects, the way the specter of Marxism haunts any liberal/capitalist effort, is this two-fold disregard for Black life. First, in not engaging with Black revolutionary writing at any depth, and then in putting forward their own reformist revolutionary politics in which anti-Blackness is not addressed and is sure to remain at its core.

But in contrast it seems like there's real promise in a complete disavowal of politics, of our citizenship among any com-

munity, of the forcing of bonds onto ourselves and others, a rejection of hierarchy and the exertion of power over others and power itself, just to restate some of the things we're talking about.

I want to make sure we get into more concrete matters, though. I'll leave this kind of open ended, but I'm really interested in your thoughts on trans separatism, mutual aid, and the underground networks a lot of us have been building spontaneously for our survival. Do you find hope in these hidden spaces and alternative/communal economies that trans women (as well as other marginalized people) carve out beneath the walls of our cities?

Winter: Well, I called myself a separatist for a long time, starting from around when I first transitioned. And to clarify because I think it's a term that's widely misunderstood, what that always meant to me was just the right to remove yourself from situations and communities that hurt you. Like it's literally just the right not to associate with people who pose a threat to you. It's basic autonomy, which is something people don't feel trans women deserve. But mostly separatism wasn't a choice at all. It was just a group of trans women defining for ourselves what our embodiment and our histories meant and that made people so hostile to us that just ceasing to engage with them became the only option, because people were so threatened by that and they still are. It would have been more accurate to say that we had been separated (exiled) than to say that we were separatists. But you adopt the labels people throw at you.

I don't really call myself a separatist anymore but it's not like my politics on the matter have changed - it's really basic stuff after all. Mostly what's changed is just that I'm not getting into fights about it every other week so it feels like less of a vital

part of my identity now. But the reason I am mostly not getting into those fights anymore is because separatism works.

I do think that mutual aid between trans women is our best shot at survival. The only catch there is like, hardly any of us have anything to share. And the trans women who do mostly want to distance themselves from us as soon as possible. But still, yknow, trans women sharing hormones, or a house or a room still makes what little we do have go further. You can also look at like, the donation posts that get circulated around tumblr. And yeah there's a lot to be sad about there, nobody's getting as much as they deserve, nobody's ever actually funding the surgeries they set out to fund. But people are getting to eat when they wouldn't have. People who were homeless are no longer homeless. And like, it's still not enough. There are still these obvious patterns in who gets funded and who doesn't. But maybe one day something decent could come of all that, just probably not on tumblr. So it gives me some hope. Some of us recognise that we need each other, even if it's not enough of us yet. I think that number is growing but I'm not sure. There are still a lot of trans women who are willing to step over the rest of us to get something for themselves.

Jamie: I like how you said that we need each other because I think when we hear the word "separatism" and this kind of vocabulary of being against community and against organization it's easy to assume (incorrectly) that that is describing a way of existing where you're just looking out for yourself and don't care about anyone else. But I think a lot of trans women already sense, as we do, that the way things get better for us individually and collectively is through things like mutual aid and just small acts of caring about and reaching out to one another.

And it's really important for trans women who have dis-

tanced themselves and are doing better financially/emotionally/in relation to structural violence to decide to stick around and help others once we reach the point where we ourselves don't need that kind of survival help anymore. Sticking around doesn't necessarily mean staying on tumblr or any particular social network; it might simply look like staying in touch with your friends, not dropping out of their lives because they're poorer, less stable, or too disabled for you now. I know a couple of trans women like that, and I have a feeling that there's also an increasing number of trans women who are in that situation of entering the middle class and consciously leaving their inconvenient trans friends behind.

But I don't know: How do you reach trans women who have been burned by community or, for whatever reason, don't want to engage with trans women in tough situations? And how do you do that without falling into the same old pitfalls of organizing, which tries to mobilize people through guilt, false promises, manipulation, and all kinds of weird shit?

With all these questions suspended before us, this might be a good place to wrap up. Not out of any sense of hopelessness or fatigue—because I feel better, more steady, more confident in my questioning, having talked with you, Winter—but in recognition of our limits. That we have no special knowledge, that we must leave room for you in this conversation, dear reader, because without your participation this whole fucking ponderous thing gets mired in a sinking sand. These zines are not instructional, they're not guidelines, or arguments; they are expressions of desire for another way, a worthwhile way of living. We'll leave this here to let Winter's words echo loudly against the walls of our rooms, the air between this building and the neighbors', the space between you and us and everyone.

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

The text of the two zines that follow has been arranged so that it falls only on right-hand pages. This was done to make it easier for readers to tear pages out of this booklet without damaging its overall integrity. That is, if you are struck as I was by the thought of wanting to carry one of these pages with you in your pocket, to tape one up on your wall or paste it to a lamp post on the street, and live with the text in that way—we encourage you to do so.

LEGALIZE
CRIME

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AGAINST REVOLUTION

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AGAINST REVOLUTION

A PRISON IS ANY STRUCTURE THAT YOU CANNOT LEAVE. YOU CANNOT LEAVE WHAT HAS NO OUTSIDE.

CAPITAL = PRISON

IDEOLOGY = PRISON

GENDER = PRISON

SOCIETY = PRISON

EMBODIMENT = PRISON

FREE EVERY PRISONER

THAT THERE EXISTS A BODY OF PEOPLE APPOINTED TO DECIDE ON MY BEHALF WHAT IS GOOD FOR ME AND WHAT IS BAD, WHAT I CAN AND CANNOT DO; THAT I AM NOT TO BE TRUSTED WITH THESE DECISIONS FOR MYSELF; THAT THIS ORGANIZATION IS IMBUED WITH SUCH POWER AS TO MAKE IT ENTIRELY IMPOSSIBLE FOR ME TO RESIST THEIR JUDGEMENTS, EXCEPT SYMBOLICALLY, EXCEPT RECREATIONALLY, THAT IS HUMILIATING, AND ANY ALTERNATIVE BODY THAT MIGHT REPLACE THIS ONE WOULD BE EQUALLY HUMILIATING.

HIERARCHY IS ALIVE AND WELL IN ACTIVIST SPACES, FEMINIST SPACES, QUEER SPACES. COMMUNITIES RECREATE SOCIETY IN MINIATURE. THEY ARE PLACES WHERE FAILED POLITICIANS FIND THEIR POWER AND PLAY THEIR PART. COMMUNITY LEADERS FIGURE THEMSELVES TO BE OUR MASTERS AND MUST BE OPPOSED. COMMUNITY DEMANDS THAT WE WORK FOR IT. WORK IS OUR ENEMY. ALL ORGANIZATION IS OUR ENEMY. IT HAS TO GO. IT ALL HAS TO GO.

WE ARE ALMOST TOTALLY DISEMPOWERED BECAUSE WE ARE ALMOST TOTALLY SURVEILLED. THE GLOBAL PANOPTICON IS NEARING COMPLETION. THE WALLS ARE CLOSING IN. THEY ARE SO CLOSE TO WINNING BUT THEY HAVE NOT YET WON. NOW THEY ARE VERY EAGER. NOW IS WHEN THEY WILL MAKE MISTAKES. IF THEY EVER KNOW US UTTERLY THEN WE HAVE LOST. BUT THEY CANNOT YET SEE INSIDE OUR HEADS. WE ARE WATCHED BUT WE MUST RESIST BEING KNOWN. WE WILL BECOME OPAQUE. WE WILL CEASE TO EXPLAIN OURSELVES. WE WILL NOT TALK TO COPS.

ONLY THE TOTAL ANNIHILATION OF POWER WILL SATISFY US. SUCH A THING CANNOT EVEN BE DESCRIBED; IT IS BEYOND OUR MIND'S ABILITY TO GRASP. AND YET WE KNOW SUCH A THING MUST BE ABLE TO EXIST, AS IT DID BEFORE US, BEFORE LIFE, BEFORE TIME. BUT OUR FUTURE CANNOT LOOK LIKE THAT. OUR ANSWERS WILL NOT BE FOUND IN THE PAST. WE ARE INVENTING SOMETHING NEW. WE WILL NOT KNOW WHAT IT IS UNTIL IT IS COMPLETE. IT CANNOT BE COMPLETE UNTIL EVERYTHING ELSE HAS BEEN DESTROYED.

ANYTHING IS BETTER THAN THIS. TOTAL ANNIHILATION IS BETTER THAN THIS. BETTER TO TEAR IT DOWN AND BUILD NOTHING IN ITS PLACE THAN LEAVE IT STANDING. I CANNOT IMAGINE THE FUTURE. I AM TRAPPED IN THE PAIN OF THE PRESENT AND I AM ANGRY. THE THINGS WHICH HURT ME APPEAR INSURMOUNTABLE, BUT I DO NOT SUFFER BY THE HANDS OF ANY GOD OR DEVIL. I AM TORTURED BY THE MACHINES THAT WE HAVE BUILT, MACHINES WE CARRY IN OUR HEARTS. I HAVE NO SOLUTIONS. I AM FILLED WITH IMPOTENT RAGE. I HATE THEM

I HATE THEM.

AGAINST REVOLUTION

PERHAPS YOU ENVISION A WORLD WHERE PREJUDICE IS OVERCOME AND HUMANITY JOINED AS ONE. I CAN IMAGINE NO SUCH WORLD. OUR IDENTITIES ARE WON OFF THE SUFFERING OF OTHERS AND WON'T BE GIVEN UP. THERE IS NO SOCIETY, ONLY THE SEETHING CHAOS OF POWER. IF ONCE THERE WAS HOPE IT IS GONE. THE CHANCE FOR A BETTER WORLD HAS PASSED GOD IS DEAD. WE ARE A B A N D O N E D

NIHILISM, ANTIHUMANISM, AND TRANS DYKE SEPARATISM

WITH NO SOCIAL
RELATIONS LEFT,

THE LAST PERSON
ON EARTH WILL BE
A TRANS WOMAN.

WE WILL BE THE
LAST TO GO.

WE WIN.

POLITICS HAS BECOME INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM AESTHETICS

I could tell you I'm an anarchist or I could tell you I'm a libertarian and I can tell you those things whether they are true or not. The ease of such a lie negates any possibility for such a statement to possess meaning. Political positioning is worthless. Worse than worthless, it is dangerous. All it affords us is the opportunity to lie.

I quit politics. It is for the dishonest. I create art, that's all. And yet, were I a politician I may lie about being a politician. So there is no difference. We pursue agendas, as blind to our own as to each other's.

NONE OF US ARE GOOD

We are hypocritical, self-promoting, self-centered wretches. As we should be. As we were made. The only virtue open to us is to be honest with ourselves.

People will call us selfish anyway, so let's be selfish. If we give and give and give still they demand more. So give them nothing. They will not be satisfied until we die for them.

THIS WORLD
IS NOT WORTH DYING FOR

Assist only when direct, immediate benefit to yourself is assured. Do not trust promises that our struggle is next. They will not repay your labour. Take all you can get and get out.

Otherwise, let them war. Let them kill and die. Stay out of it, stay safe, stay together. Survive. Whether under one regime or the next, survive.

HUMANITY'S FIGHT IS NOT OURS

OURS IS THE NATURAL STATE

We are not dysphoric because we're trans women; to be uncomfortable in your body is a consequence of being alive. Cis people rely on gender to escape the pain of existing. Their false certainty in their own naturalness relieves them of the trauma of existing as a body.

Our skin cuts us off from the world. We do not know each other. We do not know ourselves. We are divided. Cis people may imagine they know themselves, each other, but they only know gender, the false images they project on to bodies. They imagine they are the same, that some connection or union exists between them. We know that the only thing between us is empty space.

BUT THERE IS ART IN THE SPACES BETWEEN OUR SOULS

WHEN YOU'RE PRETTY, YOU'RE ALLOWED TO BE CONFIDENT. WHEN YOU ARE HATED THEY CALL IT NARCISSISM.

Take pride in all you can. The world wants us to be ashamed. Cling tightly to what helps you survive. We are beautiful and difficult to comprehend. This enrages them. They want us to be ugly and to reduce us to terms they can understand, but we are more than them, bigger than them. We do not fit in their heads.

Attraction was never meant to serve us but we made it. We love each other because we're not supposed to. Our love is a contradiction of theirs. We reject how they see us, what they call us. We reject them.

The world is superficial, shallow, all surface. It has no depth, only detail. Appearances are everything and they strike at us harshly.

THAT MAKES THEM OURS

I trade one, unbearable hurt
For another, less bearable hurt
I am glad that I did
I feel like I exist for the first time

I give praise to the small god of my heart
Who shows me how to survive and tells me why I should
And whispers the secrets of a hidden truth;
A reason to try, a reason to care
A reason to live that can't be taken away

To experience yourself, as yourself,
Is to endure the rejection of all else
It is horrible and having felt it nothing compares
And there is nothing else except those things we invent
When we cannot bear it any longer

Poetry is what I get instead of humanity
And making others feel is almost the same as feeling myself
My own emotions do not translate
I feel how it is to be a scream
Or a brain, recently bashed from its skull
Or the rock that did the job

The world is bleak and unimportant
But to be trans and a lesbian is to be thick with meaning
Meaning so thick you could cut it with a knife
Pierce it with a bullet
Bruise it with a fist